Art Buchwald

TV spot alters worker's life style

WASHINGTON—The biggest thrill any American can get is to appear on television shaking hands with one of the presidential candidates. In some cases it could change a man's life forever.

Last week I saw a Larry McTaggert shaking hands with Sen. George McGovern in front of a factory gate. McTaggert was quoted as saying, "Meat's too high, and the big guys get all the tax breaks."

That was it.

AFTER THE SHOW I decided to find out what happens to an average man who has had his one great moment on television—a chance that may never happen again.

I sought out McTaggert at his home a week later.

When I walked into the living room, I found him wearing a red velvet jacket, a white turtleneck sweater, plaid pants and blue monogrammed slippers.

"I'm rather pressed for time," McTaggert said. "Forgive me if I don't offer you a drink."

"That's okay," I said. "I'm just grateful you could see me at all. I saw you on the news last week with Senator McGovern."

"Yes," McTaggert said, "George is a fine man; I enjoyed working with him."

"I thought you gave a wonderful performance. It was honest and sincere, and you came through as a true American," I said.

"I DID THE BEST I could in the part," McTaggert said. "Of course I couldn't have done it alone. Some of the credit has to go to the cameramen and the wonderful technicians I worked with.

"I also have to thank the producer and director of the show for the marvelous cooperation they gave me. And I want to thank my mother and my wife, who had faith in me during all the years I was struggling to get on TV.

"And last but not least, Timmy O'Leary, my foreman, who let me off 15 minutes early so I could get to the gate before the other guys were let out of the factory."

"You're a very modest man, Mr. McTaggert. Tell me, if you had to do the show again would you do anything differently?"

McTaggert said, "Meat and taxes seem to be the main issues of the campaign and if I raised other issues they might have been left on the cutting-room floor.

"A vast number of people seemed to enjoy what I said, and in our profession that's all that counts."

"WOULD YOU CONSIDER making TV your career?"

"Well," said McTaggert, "it's a very risky business. It's true I had a big hit with McGovern, but that's no guarantee my next appearance would be a smash.

"They've asked me to play a role in front of the fence when Spiro Agnew visits the plant next week, but I don't want to be typecast as a factory worker. Frankly, I'd rather be on one of those medical shows where you get residuals."

"Have you had many offers?"

"NOTHING CONCRETE, though there seems to be a lot of talk in the neighborhood that I should have my own show like All in the Family. But I wouldn't do it just for the money. It would have to be a part I could get my teeth into."

"Well, thank you, Mr. McTaggert, for seeing me. I just want you to know how surprised and happy I am to discover you're just as simple and straightforward in real life as you are on the screen."

"The one thing I've learned in television," McTaggert said as he handed me an autographed picture, "is never let success go to your head."